



December 10, 2018

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105
Implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018

Dear Commissioners:

I am writing on behalf of CONTACT USA to urge you to designate a 3-digit (N11) number as a dedicated Behavioral Health and Suicide Crisis Lifeline. As the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) just reported last week, over 40,000 Americans died by suicide last year. The national suicide rate is now the highest it has been in decades. By implementing the dedicated N11 number, we have the ability to meet the dramatically growing need for crisis intervention services to millions of Americans. Similar to 911, people in mental health and suicide crisis will have ease of access to a dedicated, easy to remember nationally recognized number. Moreover, these calls will be answered by a strong network of suicide prevention and mental health crisis helplines throughout the United States. This network has been in place since the 1970's and as reported by Gould, Kalafat, Harris and Kleinman (2007), crisis helplines have proven to be highly effective at mitigating immediate suicidal intent.

CONTACT USA is an accreditation and crisis helpline membership organization with a strong, diverse community of 55 members located in 31 states. CONTACT USA is a leader in the field of crisis helpline accreditation and is the only accrediting organization in the U.S. devoted solely to establishing best practice standards of service for crisis helplines. Our mission is to inspire, educate and accredit community based emotional support programs with the vision of everyone having access to thriving effective emotional support.

During 2017, our member organizations answered over 2.5 million calls/chats/texts from those who were in a mental health and/or suicidal crisis. The volume is expected to be even higher for 2018. We believe the 3-digit number providing access to behavioral health and suicide crisis intervention is an important opportunity to meet the growing mental health crisis in the U.S. and also build upon the already existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) platform.

The NSPL has built a network of over 160 crisis helpline organizations across the U.S., providing 24/7 access to those in a suicidal or mental health crisis. As an integrated national platform utilizing one telephone number (800-273-TALK), calls are routed all across the U.S. to trained crisis helpline professionals. The NSPL has experienced dramatic growth in the last five years with 2 million calls answered last year alone.

A 3-digit access point is the progressive next step given the growth and proven effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.



We are aware that the Commission has received comments and letters of support recommending that the current 211 number and system be used for the 3-digit access to crisis intervention, rather than a dedicated behavioral health and suicide crisis lifeline. While we fully support and advocate for the purpose and service that 211 provides as the community information and referral access point, there is a distinction between the types of customary interventions and assistance provided by 211 and organizations that provide dedicated behavioral health crisis services. With the continued rising needs in both arenas, we strongly advocate for a continued dedicated 211 number and a newly established 3-digit behavioral health and suicide crisis lifeline.

Thank you very much for this timely and vital opportunity. We sincerely appreciate the work and dedication to creating this opportunity that has the real potential of making a positive, sustaining change to those in behavioral health and suicidal crisis. We look forward to being a part of this change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Gail Selander".

Gail Selander, M.B.A., M.A.
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